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SIPDIS

AIDAC
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DCHA/AA FOR MIKE HESS
AFR/AA FOR KATE ALMQUIST AND FRANKLIN MOORE
AFR/SA FOR ERIC LOKEN, LORIE DOBBINS, JENNIFER KOLE
OFDA FOR KY LUU, ANNE CONVERY, SHANNON ROGERS, AND TRESJA DENYSENKO

FFP FOR JDWORKEN, LPETERSON, AND ASINK
PRETORIA FOR JWESSEL, OFDA

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SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN SITUATION INTENSIFIES DRAMATICALLY WITH
VIOLENCE

REF: HARARE 343

SUMMARY

1. In October 2007, then- Charge d'Affaires Kathy Dhanani renewed the complex emergency disaster declaration for Zimbabwe based on the continuing effects of poor governance on the most vulnerable segments of the population (Ref). Post draws attention to the rapidly declining and new, violent nature of the humanitarian crisis following the March 29 harmonized elections. Although current needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) are being met with in-country resources, Post alerts USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and AFR to a potential need for USG emergency assistance for IDPs, including food, non-food, medical, and protection support, if violence intensifies or is prolonged. Although Post realizes that a second declaration is not required, Ambassador McGee will be issuing a statement reinforcing the existence of a humanitarian disaster septel. Post will continue to work with OFDA's Regional Advisor to monitor the situation and to identify the most appropriate forms of assistance as needs grow.

2. Following the harmonized elections, the Government has embarked on a systematic, country-wide campaign of intimidation and violence in a concerted effort to punish opposition party supporters for not voting "correctly" and to influence in their favor the outcome of the expected Presidential run-off. War veterans, military personnel, and youth militia have established centers (geographically widening their coverage) to beat, torture, and "reeducate" Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party members and supporters, polling agents, and human rights defenders. An unconfirmed number of homes and granaries have been burned and cattle slaughtered by the government's "hit squads." A growing number of persons are displaced due to property destruction and fear of reprisal. Post is concerned that the situation will deteriorate and possibly plummet after a run-off if Mugabe is not the clear winner.

3. The international community is monitoring the situation closely and OCHA is beginning to take a more active role to assess and track the number, location, and needs of IDPs. Human rights organizations are documenting locations and cases of violence. The most urgent needs for those displaced include tents, blankets, food, soap, and sanitary items. Local NGOs and churches are hesitant to provide assistance based on threats received and for fear of reprisal. However, through existing resources, IOM is providing for the majority of the needs of IDPs, with additional support provided by the USG-funded NGO Zimbabwe Community Development Trust (ZCDT),

Christian Alliance, and some church affiliated groups. Title II emergency food aid from in-country stocks are also being utilized to respond to food needs. Since much of the violence is directed towards small-scale farmers and their laborers the impact on both the upcoming harvest and planting of the winter wheat crop is of particular concern. Food insecurity, in this dismal crop year, will be affected further by the burning of granaries and slaughter of livestock. A worrisome pattern of areas being declared by war veterans, military officers, and even district administrators as "no go" areas and threats against international NGOs is emerging and this may hamper future efforts unless the international community is able to successfully push back on the government for access to IDPs. OCHA has requested permission for field observation teams but has been denied by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. However, the UN has been told to resume field activities. Donors have requested a Senior Humanitarian Affairs Officer with a background in protection. OECD Heads of Mission are preparing a joint statement denouncing the violence. End summary.

CURRENT SITUATION: POLITICAL VIOLENCE

¶4. The nature of the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe rapidly deteriorated following the March 29 harmonized elections when the Government initiated a campaign of intimidation and violence, unleashing "hit squads" comprised of war veterans, military officers, and youth militia throughout the country to punish MDC supporters for not voting for the ruling party and to influence a potential run-off vote. Torture centers, from which the "hit squads" operate, have proliferated in rural areas, and training camps for youth militia are reported to exist. Abductions appear to be occurring at night and in the daytime alike. Reports abound about victims being beaten and then released far from home and medical

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care. The most commonly reported injury is deep tissue wounds; however, the nature of violence is requiring a higher degree of specialized surgery. Horrific accounts of maiming, psychological intimidation, and rape have also been reported. IOM reports and recent trends confirm that incidents of violence and the geographic extent of human rights abuses are increasing. To date, the USAID-supported Counseling Services Unit (CSU) has provided approximately 500 individuals with medical, psycho-social, and protection assistance, with most individuals having been treated in Harare after arriving from other parts of the country. On a typical day, CSU processes approximately 50 victims per day, providing them with medical and psycho-social assistance and helping them to find safe havens with family or friends after being treated.

¶5. As violence increases so too is the number of displaced persons who are forced homeless by arson or who fear for their safety after being threatened or tortured. At present, displaced persons are concentrated in Harare, Mutare, Chipinge, Nyanga, Gokwe, Karoi, and Bulawayo, where they are seeking refuge at MDC offices. Reports of displacements have also surfaced in Murewa, Mutoko, Mutasa, Makoni, Hwedza, Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe, and Mvuma Drefontein, but the numbers and locations of these individuals are hard to track at this point. Furthermore, an unknown number of MDC leaders are in hiding. To date, IOM reports that the number of people crossing border posts is within normal levels. Although large-scale displacement has not occurred, Post is concerned that this is highly likely as violence intensifies. (Comment: There is also concern that the Government is attempting to displace larger numbers of people to inhibit the ability of opposition supporters to vote in a run-off. For this reason, it is important to keep IDPs in their home constituencies. End comment.)

¶6. From April 19-20, two members of the USAID/Zimbabwe Democracy and Governance Office and OFDA's Harare-based humanitarian specialist conducted an on the ground assessment of violence in Mutare, Chipinge, and Nyanga. The general findings of their assessment are noted below (see para 9 for emergency needs and response to date). Post plans to conduct subsequent monitoring trips on a routine basis to confirm reports of violence and emergency needs. Post has encouraged other donors, particularly

OCHA, to conduct similar trips.

--Harare: Until Friday, April 25, approximately 200 people were seeking refuge at the MDC headquarters (Harvest House) in Harare. Many of those present had traveled to Harare from rural areas after having been victimized to seek safety and medical assistance and to report other victims in need of care and protection. However, mid-day on April 25, armed police raided Harvest House and forcibly removed all IDPs, taking them to Harare Central Police Station. Women and children were released by police over the weekend and are being provided assistance by the Women's Trust; however, most men were dispersed throughout the city to various jails and subsequently released on Tuesday April 29. USAID food was to be provided to the IDPs at Harvest House, but the food was not delivered before the IDPs were taken to the police station. Now that they are accounted for, the women and children are being provided USG food aid through the Catholic Development Commission.

--Mutare: As of Friday, April 25, 105 families were seeking refuge at the MDC office after having witnessed the destruction of their homes at Evans Farm and having been forced at gun point off of their property. Most of the displaced arrived on April 16. At the time of the USAID assessment, the families were sleeping in the open surrounded by the furniture and other belongings that they were able to carry with them. Limited water and toilet facilities were available. Beginning on April 25, IOM began moving 57 households to other locations. Eleven households are returning to their rural areas and another 46 are being relocated to Tsvingwe Transit Camp in Manicaland. Most of the families at Tsvingwe (36) will be sheltered in private one-room buildings; the other 10 families will stay together at a warehouse.

--Chipinge and Nyanga: Approximately 35 individuals are seeking refuge at MDC offices in both Chipinge and Nyanga. Reports were made to the assessment team that people are not sleeping in their homes for fear of abduction. In Chipinge, war veterans are preventing food supplies from being delivered to local shops. Maize meal is available from the Grain Marketing Board, but only to those with a letter from war veterans demonstrating affiliation to ZANU-PF.

FOOD IMPLICATIONS

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17. Since much of the violence is directed towards small-scale farmers and farm laborers, the impact on both the upcoming harvest and planting of the winter wheat crop is of particular concern. Food insecurity will be affected further by the burning of grain stocks and the slaughter of cattle. Food needs this hunger season also will be exacerbated by below average crop yields resulting from flooding that took place in December/January. In-country stocks of cereals, pulses, and vegetable oil are adequate to meet the current need.

18. Normal food distributions for this point in the year have ended. Given the violence, it is uncertain to what extent school feeding and safety net/vulnerable group feeding programs will be able to resume. The first test of this will be in mid-May when schools reopen. USAID is working with WFP and its C-SAFE NGO partners to re-establish contact with counselors at the local level to test the feasibility of operating in schools. USAID is hopeful that the non-sensitive nature of schools will provide an opening from which to support IDPs. The Mission has established a working group comprised of its food aid partners (WFP and C-SAFE) and human rights groups to ensure that the food needs of the displaced are met. Although large-scale distribution of household rations will apparently be needed earlier in the year due to the poor harvest, because of the inability to hold community meetings (essential for registration) there will no doubt be a delay in start-up.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS/CURRENT RESPONSE CAPACITY

19. The most urgent needs for those displaced include tents,

blankets, food, soap, and sanitary items. Using existing resources, IOM, ZCDT, Christian Alliance, and some church affiliated groups have been able to meet food and non-food needs of the displaced. The existing stock of non-food relief supplies of IOM, UNICEF, WHO, OXFAM, and NGO partners is sufficient to meet ongoing non-food needs of IDPs for a limited (though not protracted) period of continued violence. Items in stock include plastic sheeting, tents, water containers and tanks, chlorine, solid waste kits, and soap. Similarly, on the food side, WFP and C-SAFE have adequate stocks in-country and in the pipeline; however, these levels are intended for school feeding and safety net/vulnerable group feeding. Therefore, if the number of IDPs increases dramatically, the pipeline will need to be revisited. Delivery of assistance is dependent on operational space. The designation of "no go" areas by war veterans, military officers, and even district administrators (under pressure of those perpetrating the violence) may hamper efforts to provide assistance. International NGOs have also received worrisome threats in the field. OCHA has now encouraged each of the UN agencies to resume operations in rural areas unless prohibited to do so because of security threats. Those NGOs with curtailed operations are likely to follow suit. OCHA is working with the Government on the access issue. This will be important to overcome not only for ongoing programs but also for assistance to IDPs, as many local organizations (including churches) have been hesitant to provide support to victims of torture for fear of retribution.

¶10. The network of hospitals and clinics throughout the country are either non-functional or unaffordable, resulting in victims having to travel great distances (oftentimes on foot) to access medical care. Absence of essential drugs and other health care commodities is also affecting the ability of victims to obtain medical treatment. Though DFID and the EU have provided UNICEF with funding to procure enough essential drugs for four months, distribution of the drugs is problematic since NATPHARM is government operated. Another constraint to medical care for victims of torture is the fact that CSU is the only donor-funded organization that provides medical and psycho-social treatment free of charge. Furthermore, because CSUs services are entirely funded by the USG, they are in jeopardy of being interrupted by overstretched financial resources. The Mission is in the process of requesting an early release of FY 08 resources for CSU. The length, scale, and severity of violence will affect how quickly these resources are exhausted.

USG ASSISTANCE

¶11. Based on the existing complex emergency disaster declaration issued in October 2008, the USG has utilized existing programs to respond to the violent turn of events. OFDA is building on a

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previous grant to put into place a follow-on award of \$750,000 to IOM; funding under this mechanism will be used to respond to IDP needs. In addition, through a small grant provided by the Mission's democracy and governance program, ZCDT is providing food and non-food assistance to IDPs. Furthermore, the USG is providing soap to IDPs via Oxfam's existing grant with OFDA to alleviate the effects of water and sanitation service delivery breakdowns for urban vulnerable populations. Title II emergency food aid is being provided from in-country stocks to assist IDPs. OFDA also is supporting humanitarian coordination through \$100,000 in FY 08 direct funding to OCHA.

¶12. Post may request OFDA consideration for additional non-food relief assistance for IDPs, protection-related programs, and medical aid for victims of torture if violence intensifies or is prolonged. Post will continue to monitor and report on the humanitarian crisis, and consult with OFDA about appropriate USG assistance in response to continuing and, likely, expanding needs.

COORDINATION

¶13. Per reftel, there are concerns regarding OCHA's ability to

effectively coordinate information collection and dissemination and a multi-donor response. However, they appear to be stepping up to the plate to lead the effort. OCHA is beginning to track numbers, locations, and needs of IDPs, is holding meetings with more frequency, and is considering the deployment of a Senior Humanitarian Advisor. Additionally, the UN has fielded two representatives from the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights. OCHA also is coordinating the possible deployment of two sets of multi-agency field visits to investigate the violence and ascertain any associated needs. Three of the teams were to visit Mudzi, Mutare, and Harare environs from April 26-27, but were put on hold following the Ministry of Social Welfare's dismissal of the need for the donor missions. Due to the government's response, it is unclear at this point if the assessments will take place. From May 1-2, three additional assessment teams are tentatively scheduled to go to Bulawayo, Masvingo, and Hurungwe.

¶14. As more information becomes available, an update to this sitrep will be provided.

MCGEE